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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [ETRD](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL BURTON MEETING WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM B. WOOD FOR REASONS 1.5 (B&D)

11. (C) Summary: During a working lunch with CODEL Burton, President Uribe discussed the successes his government has achieved in security, economics, and the fight against narco-terrorists. He outlined broad, short-term goals in support of his current policies related to demobilization, drug eradication, and Colombia,s position on the FTA. Both parties discussed concerns over the uncertainty of Ecuador,s political situation. The CODEL expressed strong support for President Uribe,s policies. Uribe began the meeting in front of the press, asking the Minister of Environment to comment on when the aerial eradication of coca would begin in Colombia,s national parks. End Summary.

12. (U) On April 22, President Uribe hosted a working lunch in Baranquilla for the members of CODEL Burton: Vice Chairman of the Western Hemisphere Sub-Committee of the House International Relations Committee Jerry Weller of Illinois, Jim Moran of Virginia, Henry Cuellar of Texas, Ron Lewis of Kentucky, Kenny Marchant of Texas, Joe Wilson of South Carolina, and Darryl Issa of California (Chairman Dan Burton and Representative Hinchey joined the CODEL on April 23). The delegation expressed bipartisan support for Plan Colombia and praised President Uribe,s leadership in the fight against drugs and terrorism. For his part, President Uribe told the delegation that he is proud that the U.S. is Colombia,s &great ally8 and he thanked the Members for their support.

13. (C) In addition to discussing bilateral issues, the Congressional delegation expressed concern over the situation in Ecuador. President Uribe said he shared their concern and was waiting for the OAS report to give a "hint of legality" to the change of government. Uribe said President Lula had called to say he had agreed to grant Gutierrez asylum in Brazil. Uribe added that he had not taken a call from former president Gutierrez earlier in the day, but would be phoning the former president after lunch with the delegation. Uribe said the situation appeared to be stable and that any new Ecuadorian government must begin with stability. Uribe said the U.S. should reach out to the new government on issues such as the FTA and the election of next OAS Secretary General.

Great Strides on Security/Peace Process

14. (C) President Uribe began the lunch by checking off a long list of his administration's accomplishments to improve national security throughout Colombia. Noting that he had been the target of two terrorist acts in Baranquilla during his presidential campaign, Uribe said crime in the city had declined 60 percent. He added that there have been no terrorist attacks in Bogot in over two years, and no kidnappings in the capital over the same period of time. Uribe said homicides in Medellin declined 34 percent in his first year in office, 42 percent his second, and 50 percent in his current third year.

15. (C) Uribe told the delegation it is not easy to defeat 50,000 terrorists funded by illicit drug money. With determination, however, Uribe said he was confident Colombia will win. He noted that under his administration, 12,000 combatants have been taken off the battlefield) 6000 deserters and 6000 demobilized from the AUC. He said his government is willing to negotiate with any group willing to commit to a cease-fire and talk peace. Uribe said the peace process with the ELN was suspended because the group would not agree to suspend kidnapping.

16. (C) Uribe said Colombia,s congress is developing a framework for negotiations that will apply to all armed groups, noting that all groups commit similar crimes. He said the law must be balanced between justice and peace, and that it cannot be a law of impunity in the name of peace. Uribe added that the last peace process granted amnesty, but the new Colombian Constitution no longer allows the government to pardon crimes against humanity. Uribe declared that those who commit atrocities must go to jail, but he added that the sentences cannot be long, perhaps 5-8 years at most. He said the criminals must forfeit their illicit wealth and that the government will use these seizures to provide reparations for the families of the victims of

violence. Uribe said the government would not negotiate extradition as part of the peace process.

17. (C) Representative Issa complimented Uribe on his peace process accomplishments, especially concerning the 6000 demobilized paramilitary members. Issa noted that winning the hearts and minds of the combatants and the communities where they live is key to continued success. Uribe responded by describing the importance of developing a successful resettlement program. He said his administration wants to prepare the former combatants to quickly find legal jobs. He added that as a result of initial resistance from the private sector, the GOC will employ many of the demobilized in support of public works. Uribe stated that 30,000 rural families that once worked in the drug trade now work for the government of Colombia, some as conservationists protecting sensitive rain forest areas.

Stay the Course in the Fight Against Drugs

18. (C) President Uribe announced to the delegation that he had signed over 280 extradition cases, mainly for criminals bound for the United States. He added that his administration is working to resolve problems with the Supreme Court of Justice concerning the allowable length of sentences, to further facilitate additional extraditions. Representative Weller thanked President Uribe for his government's efforts in this area, acknowledging that the President's actions come with a political cost at home and in the region.

19. (C) Uribe strongly promoted aerial eradication as a key tool in the war against drugs. He said opium production went down in 2004, although coca cultivation was up slightly. Uribe added that, as a result of aerial eradication efforts, the coca plants that have been re-planted in fumigated areas are less mature and not as productive as the plants that were destroyed by aerial spraying. Uribe stated that during Secretary Rice's upcoming trip to Colombia, he would ask her

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to look for ways to bring two new wings of spray aircraft to Colombia to increase Colombia's aerial eradication capacity.

Uribe said he also supported strengthening the manual eradication program in Colombia. He added that manual eradication is not a replacement for aerial spraying, but rather a compliment to the aerial eradication program.

10. (C) Before lunch began, President Uribe told a staked out press corps that aerial eradication was helping win the fight against drugs in Colombia. He went on to describe the importance to his administration of spraying coca cultivations in Colombia's national parks. He then turned to Environment Minister Suarez and asked her when spraying in the parks could begin. Looking somewhat surprised, Minister Suarez talked briefly about awaiting a decision on this matter from the Consejo Nacional de Estupifacientes (CNE) and other legal entities. Uribe urged her to move quickly on the issue, and she agreed to do so.

Economic Trends Are Positive) FTA Discussed

11. (C) President Uribe told the delegation that Colombia's economic situation had improved considerably under his administration. He pointed to a reduced fiscal deficit, reduced inflation targets (4.5-5 percent for 2005), and an increase of around 30 percent in private investment growth for 2004. Uribe said the constitutional amendment concerning pension reform had passed through 5 of 8 required congressional debates, and that he was optimistic the amendment would be passed by June 20, when congress adjourns.

12. (C) On trade issues, Uribe said there is a political debate in Colombia over the role of Colombia in a globalized economy. The debate, he added, centers around the sensitive issue of agriculture. Agriculture, according to Uribe, represents almost 20 percent of Colombia's GDP. Promoting agriculture, he said, is also the best way to destroy illicit crops. Turning to the issue of agriculture subsidies, Uribe said he understands U.S. agricultural policy, and that he would not ask the U.S. to abolish its subsidy program. Instead, Uribe said Colombia would like a compensation fund set up to subsidize Colombian production of five or six sensitive agricultural products (he mentioned wheat, corn, soy, sugar, rice, and cotton) that compete with U.S. products receiving domestic support. Uribe said supporting these products in Colombia is necessary to defeat terrorists and eliminate illegal drugs.

13. (C) Representative Weller said the U.S. Congress understands the sensitivity of the agricultural sector. He told Uribe that the Congress is hopeful that the WTO will

soon move forward on a comprehensive approach to reducing and eliminating agricultural subsidies around the world, including from the U.S., Europe, and Japan. He added that the U.S. cannot unilaterally eliminate subsidies and still hope to achieve a global WTO agreement on the issue. Representative Issa told Uribe that transition time for sectors affected by the FTA are important tools that can be used to ease sensitive sectors into free trade realities. Weller added that international education can strengthen trade relationships and could be a selling point for those working in sectors affected by the FTA. Uribe agreed and stated that his political stump speech included support for programs that increased vocational education and used international PhD programs to targeted research needs and develop new curricula for Colombian academic institutions.

14. Comment: The tone of the meeting was very positive. Representative Moran, complimenting Uribe, said Colombia is pulling the region together, and that the GOC is viewed by many as a model of mature democratic institutions. Uribe's rejection of totalitarian rule and his success on issues related to security and the peace process, Moran noted, have generated a high level of popularity for his policies. The bipartisan delegation expressed continued support for Colombia's progress.

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